ISSN 0790-7389

Ó Domhnaill Abú

O'Donnell Clan

Newsletter No. 27

Winter 1998

President of Ireland, Mary McAleese in Donegal Castle.

News

New Book on Red Hugh

A new book on the life of Aodh Rua has recently been published in Australia. The author, Deborah Lisson, mentioned under the heading, ***'Australian Author visits Lifford'*** in newsletter No. 23, was back in Ireland last September to discuss its Irish publication with the Irish publishers, O'Brian Press. The 200 page paperback historical novel is planned to be launched at the O'Donnell Clan Gathering next August, possibly on the opening night at the castle. The book, simply entitled ***Red Hugh,*** is aimed at the teenage market but as Ms. Lisson has stuck closely to fact, it makes great reading to anyone interested in the events of that era. We wish her luck with her endeavour and look forward to the Irish publication next year.

Another Book on Red Hugh

On page 2 of the last issue of Ó Domhnaill Abú appeared an article about the movement in the United States to have Red Hugh beatified. "To educate other Roman Catholics" in this matter, it said, Shirley Starke had written a short biography entitled, "Red Hugh – the story of Hugh Roe O'Donnell". During the summer I acquired a copy of this 40 page booklet and was delighted with its production. It is well researched and presented and, as would be expected, tends to highlight O'Donnell's religious practices. For a short factual biography of this great Irish hero I think it is well worth buying. It is available for $3.99 + postage from the author – Route 2, Box 230, Valley City, ND 58072, U.S.A.

President visits Castle

On the 18th April 1998, Mary McAleese, President of Ireland visited Donegal Castle. As far as I know, it was the first ever official visit by an Irish President. A large crowd had gathered to give her a warm Donegal welcome. Having been played into the Castle grounds by a piper, she was shown around by the Mayor, Paddy Meehan and myself. Later she made a speech in which she praised the great contribution made by the O'Donnells at home and abroad. She also complimented those responsible for the restoration work done to the Castle.

Henry O'Donnell.....Again!

I always ask, "Is there any getting away from this man?" Once again he made the news when in June last he came 3rd in the 5,000 meters event of the World Masters Swimming Championship in Morocco. This was the only event held in the open seas, all others took place in swimming pools. With over 2000 competitors it was a marvellous achievement to feature in the top three. His time was 57 minutes. (We will have another little bit of news about him at the Clan Gathering!!!).

Valladolid 2002

At the last few meetings of the Clan Association discussions have developed as to how we could or should commemorate the 400th anniversary of the death of Red Hugh, 10th Sept. 1602. Many ideas have been thrown about e.g. visiting Simancas Castle where he died and unveiling a memorial in Valladolid where his remains lie, bringing his remains (if they could be located) back to Donegal. If you have any ideas or would like to be involved, let us know – time's passing.

Internet

Communication is becoming simple and fast through the medium of the Internet. Since going on-line about a year ago my volume of incoming mail has increased about ten fold. It is noticeable that more than 90% comes from the U.S. Last June I developed a simple web site which I updated in October. Many people stumble across it, I don't know how, as it is quite insignificant, but it is a great asset in publishing forthcoming events etc. My URL is **http://homepage.tinet.ie/~vod** and all updates are posted there. Be sure to add this address to your Favourites.

The up-to-date programme for the 1999 Clan Gathering is available there along with a list of places to stay. After Christmas I hope to add other information e.g. transportation from sea and air ports to Donegal. So do keep in touch.

JUST WHO WAS THIS RATHER ROMANTIC O'DONNELL?

Where there is smoke there is fire, and so we never discount family traditions, but we allow that in the course of time they may have lost or gained a bit here and there.

It has been told that a certain James Lewis O'Donnell was employed as an agent or manager by James Hamilton of Fintra whose wife was Elizabeth Johnston. It appears that young James O'Donnell caught the eye of his employer's youngest daughter, Sarah (Gantlet Amelia). Her father would never have allowed such a marriage so the two young people ran away together. We do not know where they got married (we presume they did) and we do not know where they raised their children but we do know that two of the sons turned up in Co. Tyrone, and both were school masters.

Hamilton Lewis O'Donnell was my husband's great grand father, born about 1800, whose name appears in various places in the vicinity of Omagh from 1826, teaching at Augaleague; 1835, living at Omagh and Corlea; 1846, at Gortmore. At the time of the Griffith Valuation he had a small property at Gortmore and it was here in 1855that his mother Sarah died, in her 85th year. Ten years later he died at the same place aged 65. Very soon afterwards most of his family and his widow left for Victoria in Australia. One son, Irwin, came to New Zealand, but I have not found out what became of the oldest son William, who was living at Gortlea when he married Matilda Brown in 1861.

I have had contact with the descendents of Johnston Spence O'Donnell, another son of Sarah (nee Hamilton). He was a teacher in the vicinity of Strabane . His family seem to have gone mostly to the U.S.A., and a big part of my story came from them. They name Sarah's mother as Elizabeth Johnston.

The dashing young James Lewis O'Donnell remains a shadowey and romantic figure. He must have had a lot going for him to have been able to tempt away the daughter of a well to do house even if she was the youngest. He was said to have had a university education. Sarah seems to have been getting on for thirty when she decided to defy Papa.

The odd thing is that when Sarah's death notice was put in the Omagh newspaper, it named her father but not her husband. For the life of me I cannot think of any reason that his name would be omitted. A memorial which was written some years after her death spoke of a happy marriage, a long widowhood and a loving care by her son's wife in her old age,

We, all these generations down the line would like to be able to know more about Sarah's husband. We know so little but there is enough to stir the imagination.

If anyone has any comment on this story or further information, it would be of great interest to -

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1599

(Continuing with Red Hugh's career from where we left off in No. 26.)

As we read in ODA No. 26, Red Hugh had made Ballymote Castle his chief residence and headquarters in 1598. With Tír Chonaill and most of Connacht under his control, Ballymote was more central than Donegal and it was from here that all future campaigns would be carried out.

The most significant event of 1599 was the Battle of the Curlew Mountains(Cath an Chorr Shliabh) in mid-August but first we look at a few earlier events.

One of those portions of Connacht loyal to the English was the territory known as Thomond just north of Limerick. This was the land of the O'Brians and O'Donnell couldn't accept their chief, Donncha O Briain being submissive to the enemy.

Early in 1599 O'Donnell assembled his forces at Ballymote and marched south. On arrival there he sent parties of men to all corners of the territory to take, by force if necessary, as many cattle and other booty as they could. Meeting with little opposition, all returned within a few days with herds of animals and other loot. Placing his best soldiers at the rear all proceeded north over the Burren. "*Their march was calm and slow without haste or hurry in driving their steeds and prey, for they could not ride their horses through the crooked, narrow, perilous, sickle-sharp rocks of stony Burren*".

From then(February) till June we are told that "*Ó Domhnaill was in Ballymote at ease, without exploit or hosting.*"

In June a Spanish ship with arms for two thousand men landed(we are not told where) and the weapons, pikes and matchlock guns, were divided equally between O'Neill and O'Donnell.

(The following account of the Battle of the Curlews is closely based on that of Colonel Cyril M. Mattimoe, retired from the Irish Army.)

After the victory at the Yellow Ford in Aug. 1598, Red Hugh moved to Ballymote Castle which he had bought from the McDonagh for £400 and 300 cows. In May 1599 the most powerful and most expensive army yet seen in Ireland had begun to land in Dublin under the command of the man who bears the ultimate responsibility for the Battle of the Curlews – Robert Devereaux Earl of Essex – Lord Lieutenant, soldier, courtier and great favourite of the Queen.

Elizabeth's orders to Essex were brief and clear: he was to move against Ulster and destroy O'Neill and O'Donnell. Instead he turned south and in a useless campaign almost destroyed his fine army with nothing to show for it. While resting in Limerick he held discussions with Sir Conyers Clifford, Governor of Connacht, who had been summoned there to meet him. One decision made was to have very serious repercussions for all concerned. O'Connor Sligo who belonged to Essex's entourage was to return to his castle at Collooney and endeavour to rouse the people in that area against O'Donnell. The plan was most unwise. It had no hope whatever of succeeding but Essex in his burning desire for success did not see things in this light. Clifford returned to Athlone. O'Connor Sligo got safely back to Collooney Castle. The Lord Lieutenant Essex, having had his fill of misfortune in Munster, arrived back in Dublin just as disastrous news was coming in from Connacht. O'Connor Sligo had no sooner reached Collooney Castle than he was besieged by O'Donnell. Essex was in a dilemma. He was in no condition now to tackle O'Donnell; yet he could not remain idle in Dublin. He summoned Clifford and spent two days working out a new plan for Connacht. Clifford, with some reinforcements supplied by Essex, would return to Athlone and begin preparations for an advance to Collooney via Roscommon -

Tulsk – Boyle – Curlews. Having raised the siege of Collooney he would continue to Sligo and there erect a new fortification which would replace the one burned down by O'Donnell, and serve as a base for further operations against West Ulster. Building materials would be shipped from Galway to Sligo by Tiobóid na Long(Theobald of the Ships) who had inherited his mother's(Grace O'Malley) fleet.

It was now nearing the end of July. Clifford returned to Athlone and in three weeks was ready for the advance to Collooney. Before departure Essex warned him not to move unless he was fully satisfied he had everything he needed. But Clifford felt confident and wished to meet O'Donnell before O'Neill could come to his aid. On the 14th of August he set out from Athlone. Among Clifford's army were some Irish clans submissive to the Queen namely '*O'Connor Don with his assembly, MacSuibhne na dTuath who was in rebellion against O'Donnell and in league with the Governor.*'

O'Donnell, having organised the siege of Collooney Castle(mid-June), left his cousin Niall Garbh with 300 men to continue while he, with the rest, moved to Dunavaragh a secure location high in the hills above the Curlew Pass. His strength is given as 2000 but shortly before the battle he dispatched 600 to Sligo to prevent Theobald of the Ships unloading his cargo there. Some of O'Donnell's advisers felt it was unwise of him to split his army so, but Hugh was determined to keep these three elements apart.
Furthermore he reminded his army that '*it is not by the number of soldiers the battle is broken but by the power of God.*'
We are told that O'Donnell's men spent several weeks at Dunaveeragh waiting for the Governor to pass that way. During that time they were exercising themselves and preparing their weapons for the fight. '*They were cleaning, polishing and adjusting their guns, and warming and sunning their grain powder and filling their pouches and casting their leaden bullets and heavy round balls, socketing and riveting their stout round javelins and war-halberds, polishing their long broad-swords and their bright-shining axes, and preparing their arms and armour and implements of war also.*'
In Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill (Life of Red Hugh) by Lughaidh Ó Clérigh, almost a page is given to the religious preparations of O'Donnell and his men. It was customary for Red Hugh to fast for three days, confess his sins and receive Holy Communion before a battle or whenever there was danger. On this occasion he requested his army to fast on the day before the Feast of the Assumption(of Mary into Heaven). On the morning of the Feast day, Sunday 15th August, all attended Mass. Afterwards they went to their tents to take a meal before encountering the enemy. When finally assembled, Red Hugh addressed them and, even those who were not near him could hear, '*on account of the loudness of his voice and speech.*' A poetic version of that address was published in ODA No. 18.

Lughaidh Ó Clérigh then gives an account of how O'Donnell positioned his men. '*He placed his swift energetic youths and his nimble athletic men and his marksmen, with their loud sounding sharp-aiming guns and their strong smooth-curved bows and their cruel, whetted javelins, and their throwing darts also.*' It goes on for a whole page in great detail about how the battle was planned by O'Donnell. Trees were cut to make barriers at intervals along the rout through which the English were expected, musketeers and archers placed in the woods along the pass while Red Hugh with most of his men waited out of sight over the ridge. The plan, of course, was for the snipers to harass the enemy all the way up the Pass so that exhausted they would come face to face with O'Donnell's well-rested men at the top.

Also present at the Curlews were Conor McDermot and Brian Óg O'Rourke. O'Rourke and O'Donnell were not on friendly terms. Apart from centuries-old rivalries O'Rourke resented many actions taken by O'Donnell recently and so on this day Brian Óg with his clansmen refused to place himself under Red Hugh's command but instead took up position east of the Curlews. From this spot his sentries could detect an enemy force moving out of the town of Boyle and he could have his men at the Pass within half an hour.

McDermot with his 300 men positioned themselves in the woods on both sides up along the Pass through which the English would march. As this was McDermot territory it was their privilege to strike the first blow.

Clifford, as we have seen, was in a hurry when leaving Athlone and so pressed his men very hard covering 30 miles the first day over rough roads with little food. Next day they covered 15 miles to Boyle arriving there exhausted and hungry. Here they had planned to eat and rest but Clifford receiving intelligence that the Pass was undefended and that his army was not yet expected, decided to resume the advance. His men and senior commanders complained but Sir Conyers would not change his mind. He promised food and rest when they were through the Pass and so the tired and weary soldiers struggled to their feet and took their place in the ranks for the long climb to the top of the Curlews.

Clifford's army amounted to 1496 Foot and 205 Horse: a small force considering the task in hand. Two thirds were armed with Arquebus; the rest used Pike. The Arquebus was a crude forerunner of the musket, only accurate at close range. Re-loading was slow and cumbersome. Clifford increased the strength of the Vanguard to enable it to force its way through the Pass if needs be.

In those days the way over the Curlews was a rough narrow track. It was known as the Red Earl's Road(Bóthar an Iarla Rua) after De Burgo, a Norman Lord, who passed that way in the 13th century. Traces of this ancient track can still be seen. This same track left much to be desired, parts of it were so rough that they were impassable by wheeled vehicles while other stretches were bog.

The English had only gone a few hundred yards when they encountered the first barricade and came under fire from the woods on both sides. They instantly attacked but the Irish fled with little or no resistance. This pattern continued well up the Pass. After about an hour the vanguard were running out of powder and ball. New supplies should have been sent up from the rear but conditions were making this difficult and so the vanguard became very vulnerable. Worse was to follow. Sir Alex Ratcliff, commander of the Vanguard, already suffering from two wounds was hit a third time and died.

The situation in the vanguard now called for urgent action by Clifford himself but non was taken. At this point Brian Óg O'Rourke with a company of men(some sources say 140: others 500 men) came rushing to the fray. To the vanguard, already leaderless, ammunitionless and with tactics that were achieving little, this new arrival did much to undermine their confidence. Confusion began to develop; followed shortly by panic. Men began throwing away their weapons and running back down the hill through the main body who hadn't yet encountered the enemy. The latter seeing the vanguard fleeing decided to follow suit. The rearguard did likewise.

Clifford and his officers did everything in their power to halt the flight, even killing a few to make an example, but all to no avail. Sir Conyers shouting, roaring and fuming at such cowardice, and declaring he would not '*outlive the dishonour of the day*', rushed to meet an on-coming party of Irish. He died from a pike-stroke.

Back at Boyle, the Horse having waited about an hour and a half were ready to move forward, thinking of course, that the Pass had been secured. Suddenly, noticing signs of confusion in the distance, they decided to move forward to investigate. As they drew closer to the Pass they realised that something unusual was happening and galloped up the hill by a different rout. Seeing some of the Foot about half a mile away fighting for their lives they galloped to their rescue. Their sudden arrival seemed to surprise the Irish and caused them temporarily to check their pursuit. But soon many of the horses came to grief in the soft bog and O'Rourke, seizing the advantage, counter-attacked. The Horse withdrew but not before they managed to cover the retreat of many of the Foot. Sir Griffin Markham, commanding the Horse, had his right arm broken while Brian Óg O'Rourke was wounded in the hand and right thigh.

The Irish continued the pursuit to the foot of the mountain. Shattered remnants of Clifford's force continued it's flight and found refuge inside the walls of Boyle Abbey.

The Battle of the Curlews was over. It had lasted about two hours.
Moving around the battlefield Brian Óg O'Rourke came upon the dead body of Sir Conyers Clifford and recognised it. O'Rourke ordered the body to be decapitated and the head sent back to Red Hugh who in turn dispatched it to Collooney Castle. On receiving this grisly proof of Irish victory, O'Connor Sligo surrendered. Tiobóid na Long, on hearing the news, returned with his cargo to Galway.
Clifford's body was sent for respectful burial to Trinity Island on Loch Key and word of this action was relayed to Boyle in a letter written in Latin by McDermot.
English losses were great while the Irish lost very few. The Irish afterwards collected the spoils of war, killed all the wounded enemy, gave medical attention to their own wounded and buried the dead. The glory of this victory is claimed by three. Most would say O'Donnell was the hero. It was he who planned to meet the enemy there and orchestrated the battle; but there are those who say Red Hugh didn't even see the battle and that it was the McDermots who did most of the fighting; and of course the O'Rourkes maintain if it hadn't been for their intervention at the right time the English may not have been beaten so early. Let's not forget that several decisions and errors by the English contributed to their downfall.
The Battle of the Curlews, in my opinion, was the last great battle fought and won by Irish clans fighting against their archenemy, the Sassanach. V.O'Donnell.
Sources: Along with those mentioned in the article, *Annals of the Four Masters*.

Dancing at Lughnasa.

Kathleen O'Donnell, Athens, has been a subscriber and a regular correspondent to this newsletter since 1986. Two years ago she sent me the programme for a production of 'Dancing at Lughnasa' in which she played Maggie. Here are two extracts from that programme.

Kathleen O' Donnell
Maggie

Kathleen has worked tirelessly for The Greek Irish Society, almost from its inception.
A member of the Committee for twelve years, she was elected President twice during that time. A very experienced actress, Kathleen has appeared in the BBC Drama series "Fortunes of War", Peter Hall's "Coriolanus" at the Herod Atticus, "Fantochini" at the Megaron and has toured Greece with that play. She has appeared with nearly every drama group in Athens and when she casts her mind back to that summer of 1993, while doing Irish Studies at the University of Galway certain memories offer themselves to her. In brief, she happened upon the script of "Dancing at Lughnasa" and felt it would make an ideal contribution to the Greek Irish Society's activities. The rest, as you will have realised by now, is history.

Lughnasa is one of the four Celtic Fire Festivals which are celebrated at points midway between the solstices and equinoxes. Samhain, on November 1st, begins the Celtic new year. This is followed by Imbolc (February 1st), Bealtaine (May 1st), and Lughnasa (August 1st). The name is derived from the Celtic deity Lugh, god of all arts and crafts. Over the centuries, Lugh's once mighty image diminished to the point where he became a fairy craftsman and trickster named Lugh-chromain, which means 'little stooping Lugh', and was anglicised as Leprechaun. It is an irony of history that London, the capital of Ireland's ancient and long-term enemy, derives from Lugd-unum, which means 'fortress of Lugh'. This was latinised to Londinium - London.

Contrary to the observation of the other fire festivals, which were essentially family affairs, Lughnasa was celebrated on a broad community scale. Major assemblies took place, often on the top of high-points in the landscape. Dancing and feasting were top of the agenda. Until the 12th century, the Tailltinn games were held on August 1st. These were the equivalent of the Olympic Games of classical Greece, and were named after Tailtu, Lugh's foster mother, in whose honour the feast of Lughnasa was created by her foster son.

Lughnasa is the beginning of the harvest season. Traditionally, the first crop of potatoes (a major part of the staple diet in Ireland) was never lifted before this day. To have done so would have been to invite bad luck. In the past, it was not a simple matter to keep oneself in food from one harvest to the next. The beginning of the new harvest, of reaping the fruits of the previous months' hard labours, was therefore a cause for celebration. A period of scarcity gave way to a season of plenty. In some parts, it was a custom when eating the first mouthful of food from the new season's potato crop to say "Marbh-fhaisg ar an gCailligh Rua!", which translates as "Destruction to the Red-haired Hag!", a popular personification of hunger and famine.

During the feasting which traditionally marked the Festival of Lughnasa, large, low pits were dug, and these were filled with the brushwood cleared from the land. When the bonfires were well lit and the whole potatoes were being roasted, the custom was to drive the cattle through the fire, to ensure that the potatoes were turned in the fire and more practically to kill ticks, lice and other vermin in the cattles' hides.

O'Donnell Clan Gathering 1999

Friday 13th Aug.: 7p.m. Official Opening in or at Donegal Castle(depending on numbers). The rest of the evening will be held in the nearby Hyland Central Hotel where a talk will be given on some aspect of O'Donnell history, followed by a buffet and light entertainment. A display of O'Donnell genealogy and photographs will be on view. The evening will end with the singing of O'Donnell Abu and the Irish National Anthem (be sure and have them well practised) around 1.00 am.
Saturday 14th Aug.: Bus tour to places with O'Donnell historic connections. The route has not yet been decided. There will be afternoon tea and evening meal somewhere along the way.
Sunday 15th Aug.: We hope to have two or three coaches travelling from the county to where the Battle of the Curlew Mountains took place on the 15th Aug 1599. The battlefield is on the Roscommon side of the Roscommon/Sligo border not far from the town of Boyle. After visiting the site(suitable footwear, a must) and hearing the story we will travel to Boyle where a re-enactment of the battle is to take place. This event is being organised by the people of Boyle. On our return we might visit Creevlea Abbey near Dromahair(Co. Leitrim), resting place of the Larkfield O'Donels.
Monday 16th Aug.: An O'Donnell open golf tournament is planned for the afternoon with a bus-trip to Glenveagh National Park and Ionad Chois Locha for the non-golfers, all meeting later in the clubhouse. Nothing is yet planned for the evening but all are welcome to listen to the Bards(a popular Irish folk group) in the Central Hotel, Donegal Town.
Tuesday 17th Aug.: So far the afternoon is free. If the tide is suitable we would recommend a trip on the waterbus to those staying around Donegal Town. The Farewell Banquet will begin about 8.00 pm. and continue until it ends, again with the rendering of O'Donnell Abu and the National Anthem.

We would like to see a large attendance at this Gathering, and as it will be the peak tourist season we advise early booking. The committee suggests B&B only as we will be having our evening meals at different venues. Here follows a list of B&B houses and hotels we recommend. They are all in Donegal Town. There are many more outside of town. The average price per person(two sharing) is £17 = $25 approx.

Name	Address	Telephone	Guide Price
Eske Villa	Marian Villas	073-22071	£17
Maranatha	Glebe	073-22671	£17.50
Riverside House	Waterloo Place	073-21083	£16
Rosearl	Glebe	073-21462	£17.50
Shanveen House		073-21127	£16
Waters Edge	Glebe	073-21523	£19
Atlantic	Main Street	073-21187	£17.50
Donegal Tourist Lodge	The Quay	073-23060	£18.50

Name	Address	Telephone	Guide Price
Hyland Central Hotel	The Diamond	073-21027	£34
Abbey Hotel	The Diamond	073-21014	£34

'Ó Domhnaill Abú' is published by V. O'Donnell, Inver, Co. Donegal, Ireland.
Tel.: 073-36059 E-mail: vodonnell@tinet.ie Web: http://homepage.tinet.ie/~vod
Subscription rates for four issues: Ireland & Britain...£7; All other countries..£8
Copyright ISSN 0790-7389